

VZCZCXRO3983  
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #0175/01 0270920  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 270920Z JAN 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6542  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1340  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1374  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1379  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1309  
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1396  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1429  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0720  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 7626

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000175

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STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, SA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S SOUTH SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF DEVELOPMENT

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11. SUMMARY: Kulob, the President's home region and nearby Qurghon-Teppa face the same corruption, high unemployment, and political and free press restrictions that plague the rest of the country. In meetings with PolOff January 23-24, journalists, NGOs and community leaders from Kulob, Qurghon-Teppa and Shahritus revealed that apathy and self-censorship threaten to stagnate development in Tajikistan's south. However, NGOs serve their communities well and can be a catalyst for change. END SUMMARY.

12. Although President Rahmonov and many of his inner circle are Kulobis, Kulob as a whole has not benefited from pork-barrel funding. The head of Kulob's Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) criticized that funds invested in the city are not going towards businesses or institutions that could help Kulob grow long-term. Unemployment remains high and cotton production has declined. As Kulob prepares to celebrate its 2700th anniversary this year, the national government and cities across Tajikistan (on the government orders) have poured millions into Kulob to build monuments and finance festivities, but little has gone towards economic development or social services.

RESIGNED TO A CORRUPT GOVERNMENT

13. Besides pressure from the government, media organizations and political associations also have to contend with apathy and poverty. Suhrobsho Farrukshoev, chairman of the Khatlon press, notes that people worry too much about where their next meal will come from to care about politics--a common refrain in Tajikistan. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) is the ruling party in Kulob, but the Communist Party of Tajikistan is the most popular, according to Farrukshoev. He explained people believe quality of life was better under the

Soviet system and long for the Soviet days. With 180 local members, the IRPT remains weak, despite tripling its membership in three years. Other political parties, too, have a minimal presence and little to no power. The Khatlon press serves as an information center for Kulob, where people come to read newspapers because newspapers from Dushanbe are too expensive for the majority of the population. Kulob has only one, state-owned television broadcast station.

14. Even the wealthiest and most influential businessman in the region (at Vosse near Kulob) avoids politics. A former deputy in parliament, Samariddin Fazliddinov did not run in the 2005 parliamentary elections because he knew the elections would not be fair and his past criticisms of the government would prevent him from even appearing on the ballot. He turned his energy towards developing his businesses, including a textiles factory, several hectares of farms, and an independent television station. Even after leaving government, Fazliddinov still confronts corruption. Each year Fazliddinov pays \$150,000 in illegal bribes to local and national government officials to ensure that business can get done. Fazliddinov estimates that illegal taxes account for 40 percent of his business expenses. Corruption is so endemic that businesses see bribes and kickbacks as standard operating procedure.

15. Because Fazliddinov is wealthy, has government connections, and comes from a well-established family, his influence in the region allows his independent television station to operate freely without government interference. The station cooperates with Internews and regional stations. Contrary to Fazliddinov's ease, a journalist for the independent newspaper "Bomdod" in Qurghon-Teppa, Mohsharif Qurbonova, said her newspaper avoids government hassle by self-censorship. "Bomdod"'s editors often tidy up reporters' critical articles. However, after receiving training from the National Association for Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan, Qurbonova and "Bomdod"'s editors are ready

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to be bolder.

#### THE RISE OF NGOS

16. The Civil Support Center in Qurghon-Teppa has seen NGO membership increase to more than 300 since it opened in 1992. Increasingly, the town relies on NGOs to provide social services, and the Civil Support Center calls on more NGOs to assist in economic development. The Civil Support Center said the most successful NGOs in the region deal with women's or children's issues. A lack of qualified personnel and fear of government harassment have limited the number of political and human rights NGOs. Qurghon-Teppa and the surrounding area saw much violence during the civil war. Although the people are tired of Rahmonov, they fear political activity that could incite violence again even more.

17. In Shahritus, a town not far from the Afghan border, women have emerged to become the entrepreneurs and leaders of their community. As is common throughout Tajikistan, unemployment has sent Shahritus' men to Russia as labor migrants, leaving the women at home to be breadwinners. Several micro-finance institutions readily lend to women, who are now the majority of market vendors and owners of small enterprises. The chairwomen of two local NGOs, supported by Embassy grants, report that they enjoy great success in town and have a good relationship with the local government, but worry a change in the local leadership may have a negative effect on their activities.

18. COMMENT: The story in Tajikistan's south is not encouraging: a government stranglehold on power and remnants of civil war memories prevent political activities; corruption has become the norm; and people rely on NGOs for support rather than the government. Unlike the north, where there is an active civil society focused on supporting political and human rights, the southern region lacks the energy and resources to contest the establishment. END COMMENT  
HOAGLAND